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SUBJECT: GHANI CRITICIZES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR SLOW
ACTION ON ELECTIONS SUPPORT

¶1. (SBU) Presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani told PolCouns in a June 16 meeting that he was prepared to harshly criticize the international community and USG for what he saw as a "curiously unengaged" posture on the presidential election. Ghani complained that the IC had not delivered on promises to address media access and transportation issues for opposition candidates before the official start of the campaign. Ghani requested more forceful public statements from the US on its neutrality in the election, and direct rejections of reported efforts by Karzai to claim US support for his campaign. PolCouns told Ghani the US would be increasing its visibility and voice in these very areas, continuing to engage heavily with all candidates, and declaring publicly the US commitment to a credible, secure, and inclusive election.

¶2. (SBU) On the first day of official campaigning, Ghani himself took a curious approach to voter outreach, granting an interview with CNN and authoring an op-ed column for international papers. Ghani added that he would soon publish his 335-page campaign manifesto, written in English, but recently translated into Dari and Pashto. Ghani promised to run an issues-based campaign, with particular focus on individual issues every 10 days. He will begin with corruption, highlighting the government's inability to account for missing customs revenue. Employment, housing, and security will follow as the campaign progresses. First VP running mate Ayub Rafiqi, a relative unknown in Afghan politics, will take the lead on agricultural issues. Ghani hoped to win public endorsements from a collection of small democratic parties within the next few weeks, as well as collect support from minor presidential candidates as they withdraw from the race. Ghani had purposefully decided not to criticize Abdullah Abdullah -- "he is not our opponent" -- and revealed that he has maintained indirect contacts with the Abdullah campaign to keep future options open.

¶3. (SBU) Ghani vowed to follow up his charges of Karzai supporters' interference in the election with complaints to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), but insisted the IC support solid investigations and repercussions for those found to have violated election laws. "We will lose credibility and Afghans will devalue their votes if we take cases to the ECC with no outcomes," he said. Ghani will also ask the World Bank and Asia Foundation to drop their commitments to fund key Palace staffers' salaries, including Chief of Staff Daudzai, until those staffers can clearly show they are not illegally engaged in election activities.

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